

**Public Testimony to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Judicial and Corrections on  
Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustment, H.B. 5037  
from the Connecticut Justice Alliance (CTJA)**

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Christina Quaranta. I am Executive Director of the Connecticut Justice Alliance (CTJA). CTJA is a youth/adult partnership, statewide public policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending the criminalization of Connecticut's youth. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the Governor's proposed budget as it relates to judicial and corrections.

In the governor's budget there is a proposal for investment in the Department of Corrections in the amount of \$1,725,000 to hire 19 additional employees at Manson Youth Institution (MYI) to enhance education and mental health services. While this is a promising development, CTJA believes that no young person under the age of 25 should be in the custody of the Department of Corrections, especially those under 18. Youth who have their cases transferred to the adult court should be held in youth facilities and maintained in their communities, if possible, until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays. This is best practice and the policy in many states around the country, [such as Oregon, where you stay in a juvenile facility until age 25 and in Washington where the age is 21.](#) The states closest to Connecticut that follow best practice, and do not house youth charged as adults in adult facilities are: New York, Vermont, Maine, and Washington D.C. Connecticut must do better for its young people. The funding should also cover a true effort to end the use of solitary confinement and chemical agent use. Solitary confinement has detrimental effects on a person's behavioral health, is traumatic, and can result in suicidal ideation, mental decompensation, and is referred to as torture by the United Nations. The Department of Justice (DOJ), in December 2021, [concluded](#) a federal investigation into MYI and found that:

*Connecticut is violating the constitutional and federal rights of children in three areas. First, Manson's isolation practices harm children. Second, the State does not provide adequate mental health care to children. Third, qualified children with disabilities are not receiving the special education services to which they are entitled.*

The Department of Justice also found that:

*The children housed at Manson are between the ages of 14 and 17. Most have significant histories of learning disabilities and mental illness. Yet they are deprived of the very services they need to navigate the correctional environment and develop skills and competencies to become productive, successful adults – and to which they are entitled under the law. When they misbehave, they are frequently subjected to harmful periods of disciplinary isolation, regardless of whether their conduct reflects typical adolescent behavior, whether it is a result of a failure to receive entitled services, or whether isolation will improve their behavior or facility security.*

To see a real life account of the damages of DOC's practices, please read page 3 of the DOJ [report](#) and read about a young man named Ryan.

We were pleased to see an increase of Youth Service Bureau and Juvenile Review Board funding of \$2 million, however, what is needed to improve services for young people in the state

of Connecticut is closer to \$7 million. Please see the testimony of my colleague, Erica Bromley (Connecticut Youth Services Association) for a breakdown of the funding that is needed.

We were pleased to see the investment into community prevention services programs of \$1.1 million, but need more information on what these will include. Transparency with this process is important to ensure that the services being put in place are ones that the community will be able to and want to access. Including organizations who are already working with young people and families will help to ensure that funds are invested properly.

The Office of Policy and Management has been allocated \$400,000 to complete a study of secure facilities for youthful offenders- we strongly believe that this study must be done with young people and their families, advocacy groups, nonprofits already working with young people (ex: CT Junior Republic, Community Partners in Action), etc. and should not be insular. We also strongly oppose the reopening of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School to incarcerate young men who would be moved out of the custody of the Department of Corrections and into the custody of the Judicial Branch. We believe that young people should be in hardware or staff secure settings as needed- if they pose a true risk to public safety, and removed from their homes for a short period of time to receive services as needed and developmentally appropriate. Public safety and overall outcomes for young people will be improved when treating and working with young people in smaller facilities where they are able to contact supports, etc. If OPM were to begin this study, the

We would like to see American Rescue Plan Act dollars invested in young people and their communities- these dollars can be used to improve youth service bureaus, nonprofit work with young people. Some examples of ways to invest in young people include fully funding the Community Based Diversion System Plan, ensuring the schools are funded so young people have access to textbooks and other supplies, fund after school programs and agencies such as the CT Junior Republic and consider contracting with national organizations like Youth Advocate Programs to work with young people.

We urge the legislature to invest in young people, their families, and communities. We urge the legislature to act in a preventative, positive manner and not be swayed by the false narrative of a crime wave driven by young people. What young people need is investment of time, resources, love, and safe neighborhoods. Young people need to see credible messengers working in the programs and schools they are a part of. Young people need to stop being criminalized and they must be removed from adult prison in a thoughtful manner. The state budget of Connecticut is a document that reflects its priorities and we strongly believe that investing in the needs of young people to succeed in our communities should be the number one priority of folks in places where high level and important decisions are being made

Sincerely,

Christina Quaranta  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Justice Alliance